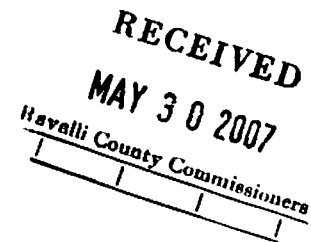


Ravalli County Sheriff's Office  
205 Bedford Street, Suite G  
Hamilton, MT 59840-2853



Chris Hoffman, Sheriff  
Kevin McConnell, Undersheriff



May 23, 2007

Commissioners,

I am writing today to advise you of our desire to exercise the escape clause on our vehicle maintenance contract with Mildenerger Motors. As you are aware, on March 23, 2007, a wheel nearly fell off one of our patrol vehicles. Kevin McConnell and Steve Holton were in Holton's Dodge Durango traveling west on I-90 near the Idaho border at mile marker 27 when the vehicle began to shake. Sgt. Holton was able to drive the vehicle to the shoulder of the interstate. It was discovered that the right rear wheel had nearly fallen off and was still attached to the vehicle only because the last stud hadn't quite broken off.

The vehicle was hauled back to Missoula by S&S Wrecker and taken to Whalen Tire. I requested that a technician inspect the wheel and try to determine what had caused the failure. It was determined that 3 of the 5 studs had broken off of the wheel hub long before the March 23rd incident. The 4th stud had broken off more recently. The 5th stud was nearly broken and was the only thing holding the wheel on the vehicle.

Sgt. Holton told me that, prior to the March 23rd trip, he had not been able to feel anything wrong with his vehicle, but that Lt. Birkeneder had observed that the wheel in question was visibly wobbling. Lt. Birkeneder advised him to take the vehicle in to Mildenerger Motors. Holton did so, informing them that the right rear wheel was wobbling. A short time later, the vehicle was returned and Holton was told that nothing was wrong with the vehicle.

It was later determined that some time before February, Sgt. Holton had taken his rig in for service. Though they were not asked to, Mildenerger's rotated the tires on Holton's vehicle. This service is always performed at Wessel's at no charge. The lugs were either over-tightened or not replaced when the tires were rotated. When the vehicle was taken in for a wobble, clearly the hub cap was not even removed from the vehicle or the technician would have seen the 3 broken lug studs. I have included photographs taken at Whalen Tire.

This is not the only incident which has caused us to be dissatisfied with the service we have received at Mildenerger Motors. Recently, a patrol car was taken in for some wiring work. When the car was returned to us, the technician had not even attempted to route the wires under the dashboard. Instead, there was an extremely large ball of wire on the passenger side floorboard. I have included photographs of this as well.

Commissioners, I realize that mistakes can happen at any mechanical repair shop, and that there are times when more than one diagnostic will be needed to determine a mechanical problem. However, the vehicles my deputies are driving in the course of carrying out their daily duties must be maintained at a higher level. I do not expect perfection from a maintenance vender but, considering the amount of money we spend on vehicle maintenance, I expect a higher level of care than we have been receiving. It is inexcusable, for instance, that Sgt. Holton's vehicle was not even cursorily inspected, considering the nature of the complaint he reported. This, coupled with the "wiring job" and several, less significant issues which have been reported to me by deputies, leaves me with the impression that the staff at Mildenerger Motors does not see maintenance of our vehicles as a priority.

At this time, there is nearly a unanimous lack of confidence in this vender among my staff. Deputies simply do not want to take their patrol vehicles to Mildenerger Motors for repair. I believe that it would be counterproductive for us to continue doing business there, in terms of keeping faith with our sworn staff. In their words, there is simply too much at stake. I fully agree with this sentiment.

I respectfully request that you terminate our contract with Mildenerger Motors and, having done so, advise me as to how we should proceed in securing these services elsewhere.

Sincerely,  
  
Sheriff Chris Hoffman

# Patrol Division



**To:** Lt. Birkeneder  
**From:** Sgt. Holton  
**Date:** 4/17/2007 6:18:00 PM  
**Re:** Repairs to vehicle 13-818  
**CC:** Sheriff Hoffman

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As far the work concerning the tires and wheels on 13-818, four new tires were put on by Les Schwab on 05-27-06. On 06-15-06, Mildenerger's removed the rear wheels and replaced the rear brake pads, I gave this invoice to Sheriff Hoffman. On 10-05-06, Mildenerger's serviced the car and rotated the tires. I do not have this invoice, but logged it on my maintenance log. I cannot remember if I gave the invoice to you or Wanda but I think I passed it on, because it was the second time Mildenerger's rotated the tires without being asked, and charged us \$20.00 (or something like that).

Sometime around the first part of February was when you told me the right rear tire was "wobbling". On 02-08-07, Mildenerger's serviced the car again and I asked them to check the tire. I gave this invoice to the Sheriff also. When I picked the car up, I asked what was wrong with the wheel. I was told (I don't remember who I talked to), that there was nothing wrong with it. They asked me if it drove alright, which it did. I told them that it had a different ply tire, and they said the tire might be misshapen or had a rock or something stuck in the tread, making it appear to wobble.

On 03-21-07, Lube Quick North serviced the car and checked the tire pressure, but I had forgotten about the wheel wobble and did not ask them to look at the tire or wheel.

03-23-07 was when the fourth lug broke off on the interstate. It was obvious looking at the lugs that the other three had been broken for quite awhile, as they were rusted and worn.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Steve Holton". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "S" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Steve Holton



*PO Box 16107  
3002 West Broadway  
Missoula, MT 59808  
406-721-1030 fax 406-721-7281*

April 10, 2007

Ravalli County Sheriff's Department  
205 Bedford, Suite G  
Hamilton MT 59840

Attention: Wanda

At the request of the Ravalli County Sheriff we inspected and repaired a 2004 Dodge Durango. On March 23, the vehicle was towed to Whalen Tire. We found that four of the wheel studs were broken off completely. Only one nut was holding the wheel on the right rear of the Durango. Three of the broken studs had a significant amount of rust at the breaking point. This would indicate that they had been broken for a while.

We also found that the wheel had been wearing at the stud holes and the hubcap was missing.

The repairs included five wheel studs, five lug nuts, a new wheel and hubcap.

Sincerely,



George Richter  
Manager

Whalen Tires - 727-1030







